

The Psychological State of Berkman, the Assailant of H. C. Frick.

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TO-DAY Berkman, who, on July 23rd last, feloniously assaulted Mr. H. C. Frick, the chairman of the Carnegie Iron and Steel Company, was convicted upon the several charges entered against him, and sentenced to twenty-two years imprisonment.

Now that the last chapter in this tragedy is closed, it may be worth while to briefly review Berkman's crime from a psychological stand-point.

Berkman, who is about 24 years of age, it seems, is a Russian by birth and has been in this country only a few years. No authentic account of his early life, has so far as I am aware, been published. If this could be obtained it would doubtless prove of much interest. But from newspaper accounts it would appear that he was associated with one order after another of anarchists in New York during the few years he has been in this country. He worked at various occupations. But both by his fellow-anarchists and fellow-workmen he was regarded as weak, vacillating, erratic and untrustworthy. The doctrines of even the notorious anarchist Most were far too mild for him. He became what is known among anarchists as an autonomist. In this group, each man is himself a separate division. The arrest and conviction of one of their number, it is believed by these anarchists, cannot entangle any of the others in legal complications, as each man acts of his own volition, and by his own authority.

While the excitement which arose from the Home stead strike was at its height, Berkman came to Pittsburg,

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and after becoming well acquainted with Mr. Frick's movements, so that he could approach him at the most opportune time, he prepared to perpetrate the crime for which he had come here. Entering Mr. Frick's office at a time he had learned that he was likely to be there, Berkman, without any preliminaries, shot him twice, and then stabbed him. He was at once seized and taken to jail, where he lit a cigarette in a very *nonchalant* manner.

During the time he spent in jail, he appears to have exhibited far more concern for his creature comforts than for the consequences of his crime. But he expressed regret that his assault upon Mr. Frick had not proven fatal.

When brought into court he was neatly dressed and wore a smile upon his face, and appeared to be unconcerned. When asked whether he desired counsel, he sneeringly replied that he did not, but would conduct his own case. After each of the various witnesses for the prosecution had testified, Berkman was given a chance to ask any questions he desired. But he scarcely availed himself of the opportunity. He asked Mr. Frick and Mr. Leishman each the question, whether he intended to kill Mr. Leishman (who was in the room with Mr. Frick on the day of the assault).

When asked whether he had any defense to offer, he replied that he had not, but remarked: "I don't offer myself as a witness, but as a defendant, and I want to give my full defense." He then produced a manuscript and read an "address" in the German language, part of which I append, as translated by the *Pittsburg Press*:

"A blood-stained register that has shamed the American justice of the murder of John Brown and the gallants of Chicago, according to the right for the righteous cause that is shame. They cry out, have human sympathy and has shamed the civilization of the nineteenth century. This register that has shamed will to-day another shame. And by this register of carnal shame I know to-day you will set me as an example for the work of my innocent right cause as little as for the murder of John Brown so little as was suffered.

"I belong to those that were murdered at Chicago. I can come myself to them which the memory of the injustice of Chicago put me to indignity and grew to me that the great Republican right is a lie.

"As little as the murders obtained in Chicago their motion in Chicago, so little will it be for you to reach your aim in my trial; so believe not that you can drive out the free spirit from the world. This free spirit cannot be oppressed. It is stronger than your collected police power, and does not bend at your mighty power.

"This spirit will go from works to works, families to families, and will enter into the hearts of all laborers of all lands, and this spark or life of this spirit shall spread over the whole world. This certain fire will grow and it is childish to oppose this free spirit. Just look through the spirit of the world and you will see that even against opposition and all sorts of hardships that this spirit remains secure. It is the story of honor. It is a story of heart. The free spirit is secure."

After reading for about half an hour, he was admonished by the Court that he would have to conclude what he had to say by one o'clock. He said he would be compelled to forego discussion of the question of capital and labor, and that he would proceed to speak of Church and State. He then, according to the *Times*, proceeded as follows:

"The State, Church and capital are leagued together to oppress the workmen. This trinity tramples them under foot. The State is sustained by capital and the Church is owned by capital, and through these workingmen suffer. The law is the helper and defender of the rich, and oppressor of the poor. This is the beginning of the end. It is now a war against the present condition of affairs. The rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer, and the end is near. These small strikes will soon end in a large one, and freedom to all the workmen of all the world will follow, and this great strike is not so far away as you think. In all lands preparation is being made for it. And now for my acts. What were my motives for this crime, and what have I accomplished? The provocation was great."

When the time set for the conclusion of the defendant's remarks had arrived he had not yet given the motives for his crime, and the judge granted him a brief extension of time for that purpose. Berkman remarked that he could not give his motives in that time, but proceeded as follows:

"My reason for my act was to free the earth of the oppressors of the workingmen. I wanted to punish him, not murder him. I did not

assault Mr. Frick, but the person who had oppressed labor. I recognized no man by a name, but the cause of the trouble, and I wanted to remove the cause."—*Times*.

After a few minutes' deliberation, the jury found him guilty.

He was then taken to the penitentiary, where he submitted to the usual preliminary formalities without protest.

From this brief account of Berkman, and his crime, gleaned from the newspapers, strong doubts as to the man's sanity must, I think, arise in the minds of most alienists. And it is to be regretted, perhaps, that the question was not raised at or before his trial. Yet when the matter is considered from the practical stand-point, it does not to me appear that the matter is one of so much regret after all. In my opinion, twenty-two years are none too many, during which is to place Berkman out of the way of doing more harm. In the Western Penitentiary his routine in life will be regulated in a manner which will be exceedingly beneficial to him. He will be subjected to a discipline and *régime*, which would hardly be possible in one of our insane asylums. As there is no institution in this State for insane criminals, he would have been, if found insane, sent, under order of Court, to one of our State Hospitals for the insane, where, perhaps, he would occupy too little time in manual labor, and too much time in writing addresses, having for their object the solution of the problems of Church and State, capital and labor.

But to return to the question of Berkman's sanity. It seems to be very probable that the man belongs to that dangerous class of insane which has been brought to public attention only too frequently of late years through such occurrences as the attempt on Dr. Hall's life, the persecution of the actress Miss Mary Anderson, the assassination of President Garfield, and whom the newspapers call "cranks," and whom alienists now pretty generally denominate as paranoics.

The episodes in Berkman's life and the features in his character which would point to this conclusion are briefly these: That he was vacillating and erratic in character may be inferred from the fact that he joined one after another band of anarchists and that he never pursued any one occupation for any length of time, and that he was regarded as fickle and untrustworthy by the other anarchists in New York. The notorious Most characterized him as "a fool" and became exceedingly wary of him. In his perverted and weakened mind the doctrines of socialists and anarchists found a receptive soil. But with the morbid exaltation of the *ego*, so commonly observed in paranoics, he was not content to serve as a private in the ranks of ordinary anarchists, but joined a "group" in which each man is, as it were a leader. This great exaltation of self led him to believe that he could in some way solve all the problems of Church and State, labor and capital. So when, during the great Homestead strike, the name of Mr. H. C. Frick became known and published daily throughout the land in connection with his position as chairman of the Carnegie Steel Co., Berkman's perverted mind led him to believe that he could become a hero, a martyr and a liberator of the working man by the assassination of Mr. Frick. Acting upon this idea he came to Pittsburgh and carefully and deliberately reconnoitered the ground, and, when fully ready, he boldly, coolly, in broad daylight, made his contemplated attempt at assassination. His perpetration of his bloody deed in broad daylight, at the busiest time of the day, when escape was impossible, tallies well with the methods of paranoics. He probably did not care for arrest and conviction, if he could only become a hero, a martyr and a notable historical character. After his attempted assassination it is not surprising that he expressed regret only because his bullets had not proved fatal.

Added to the study of his life and conduct down to the time of his arrest, the study of that during his imprisonment and trial strongly confirm the idea that the

man is a paranoic. While in jail he made no effort to secure the services of a lawyer, or to devise himself any plan of defense, but, instead prepared an address, which attempted no specific defense of the crimes with which he was charged, but which dealt with his favorite subjects of labor and capital, Church and State. A large part of this address was unintelligible and incoherent. No one but a fool could have expected that it would have any weight with a jury. Even Berkman himself apparently did not expect it to have much effect; for when invited by the judge to speak before he was sentenced, he said: "I did not expect justice, and I did not get it." Even with long imprisonment staring him in the face, he preferred to pose as a liberator and to magnify the greatness and importance of himself and his deed. For such men the prison and the gallows have no horrors.

Few people were in the court-house at the trial, as its date was kept secret. This, doubtless was, as one of the newspapers aptly said, "a source of great disappointment to Berkman." Probably he felt much chagrined that so slim an audience was present to hear such a notable "address."

Had a lawyer been retained in the case, doubtless an attempt to set up the plea of insanity would have been made. Probably Berkman, himself would have most strenuously objected to such a plea as it would have upset all his fine theories of greatness. If the man had been sane he would most likely have retained a lawyer, and then shammed insanity as the only hope of escaping prison.